

The Wombat's Welcome Mat



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Deep in the bush, under a gum tree, lived a wombat named Wanda. She had soft grey-brown fur, a broad flat head, and small dark eyes that twinkled when she smiled. She wore a faded mustard-yellow work apron with deep pockets, always dusty from digging. Wanda lived alone, and her burrow was neat and tidy, with just enough room for one.



One morning, a kookaburra called down from the branch. "Have you heard? New neighbors are coming to the old hollow by the creek!" Wenda's ears pricked up. She had never had neighbors before. She wondered what they would be like. Would they be friendly? Would they need help? She wanted them to feel welcome from the very first moment.



Wanda looked around her little burrow. The entrance was a tight squeeze, just big enough for her round body. “If neighbors come to visit, they might get stuck,” she thought. “I need to make room.” She put on her apron, checked the pockets for her favorite digging claws, and got to work. The ground was soft and cool beneath her paws.



Wanda dug and dug. Her strong front paws scraped away soil, and her long claws loosened rocks. She widened the entrance, making it bigger and bigger. Dust puffed up around her, settling on her whiskers and apron. She didn't mind the mess. She was thinking about the cozy space she would create inside.



Day after day, Wanda dug. She made a tunnel that curved like a smile. Then she hollowed out a big room—a sitting room deep underground. She patted the walls smooth and packed the floor flat. “This will be a lovely place for everyone to gather,” she said, imagining laughter and chatter filling the space.



Wanda didn't stop there. She lined the sitting room with soft dried grass and moss. She found a flat stone for a table and smooth pebbles to sit on. She even made a little shelf for a candle. The room felt warm and inviting. Wanda stood back and admired her work, her heart swelling with pride.



Word spread through the bush. The rabbit and the hedgehog, who were traveling together, heard about the new burrow. The rabbit had creamy tan fur, a white belly, and long ears with soft pink insides. She wore a sky-blue knitted scarf and carried a small canvas travel bag. The hedgehog was tiny and round, with a brown spiny back and a soft beige face. He wore a red-and-white checked neckerchief and carried a tiny woven basket.



They hopped and trotted along the path, curious about their new home. “I hope it’s cozy,” said the rabbit, whose name was Rosa. “I hope there’s room for my basket,” said the hedgehog, whose name was Henry. They didn’t know what to expect. The bush was full of surprises, and they were ready for a new adventure.



When they reached the gum tree, they stopped and stared. The entrance to the burrow was wide and welcoming, with smooth sides and a little step. "This can't be a wombat's burrow," said Rosa. "It's too big!" Henry twitched his nose. "Maybe it's a palace!" he squeaked. They peeked inside, their eyes wide with wonder.



Wanda heard their voices and came scurrying up the tunnel. “Welcome!” she said, her gentle snout twitching with excitement. “I’m Wanda. Please, come in.” She led them down the curving tunnel to the sitting room. Rosa and Henry gasped. The room was warm and roomy, with soft grass and a flat stone table. It was the coziest place they had ever seen.



“You did all this for us?” asked Rosa, her amber eyes shining. Wanda nodded. “I wanted you to feel at home,” she said. “Hospitality means thinking about what others need.” Henry set down his basket and looked around. “It’s perfect!” he cheered. “There’s even room for my basket!” They all laughed and settled onto the smooth pebbles.



That evening, they sat together in the underground sitting room. Wanda lit a candle, and its warm glow danced on the walls. Rosa shared carrots from her travel bag, and Henry passed around berries from his basket. They talked and laughed, and the burrow felt fuller than it ever had before. Wanda's heart was full, too.



From that day on, the sitting room was always busy. Neighbors came to visit, and Wanda welcomed each one with a smile. She learned that true hospitality means making room—in your home and in your heart. The wombat's welcome mat was not a mat at all, but a big, cozy room where everyone belonged.



Rosa and Henry settled into their new home nearby, but they visited Wanda every day. They brought friends, and soon the sitting room was filled with laughter and stories. Wanda's apron pockets always held a treat for visitors. She had never felt so happy. Her little burrow had become the heart of the bush.



One night, as the stars twinkled above, Wanda sat in her sitting room with Rosa and Henry. “Thank you for making us feel so welcome,” said Rosa. “You thought of everything.” Wanda smiled. “I just made room,” she said. “That’s what neighbors do.” And they all agreed that a warm welcome is the best gift of all.



So if you ever visit the bush, look for the wide entrance under the gum tree. You'll find a wombat in a mustard-yellow apron, a rabbit in a sky-blue scarf, and a hedgehog in a checked neckerchief. They'll invite you in, and you'll see that the best welcome is one that makes room for everyone.